

Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul
Railroad Depot
1104 Sixth Avenue
Marion
Linn County
Iowa

HAER No. IA-28

HAER
IOWA
57-MAR,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
Rocky Mountain System Support Office
National Park Service
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE & ST. PAUL RAILROAD DEPOT

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I. INTRODUCTION

Location: Between 11th and 12th Streets on the north side of 6th Avenue, Marion, Iowa.

Date of Construction: 1888 (Annex added in 1936)

Present Owner: James Paulsen and Daniel Stenoven

Original Use: Railroad Depot

Present Use: Vacant.

Significance: Served as the terminal for rail passenger and light freight traffic from 1888 to 1971. Dispatching and switching functions continued from this building until 1980.

II. HISTORY

A. Early Railroad History for Marion, Iowa.

Marion, now a city of approximately 20,000 persons located in the northeast part of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa metropolitan area in east central Iowa, was the county seat of Linn County from 1839 to 1919. Marion has always been a thriving community with the Courthouse, schools, churches, factories, liverys, mills, breweries and newspapers.

The earliest period of growth for Marion (1840-60) most directly attributed to the location of the county seat. At about 1860, however, Marion boosters recognized that future prosperity would be closely linked to rail service to and from the major market places. Several promoters were involved in efforts to construct rail service to Marion from Chicago and Milwaukee by various routes. In 1864, the first inter-city rail line was established to Marion from Dubuque; the trackage was finally connected through to Chicago as part of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway.

B. Marion Rail Depot

In 1873 a new freight depot was built on the northwest corner of what is now 6th Avenue and 12th Streets. This facility served the needs of the community's rail traffic for about fifteen years.

In 1887 the City of Marion transferred title to the property immediately west of the existing freight depot to the railroad as a site for the passenger and light freight depot which still stands along 6th Avenue east of 11th Street. The new depot constructed in 1888 at a cost of \$15,000 is a two-story structure of pressed vitreous brick and stone. It has a moderately steep hip roof which was originally covered with slate shingles. The lower level of the original depot included passenger waiting rooms, ticket sales and baggage and mail handling areas. The second level housed administrative offices including that of the trainmaster with its desk area functionally situated in a bay window type of projection to allow clear visibility of rail traffic from both the east and west.

The old 1873 depot was removed as soon as the new one was put into service. Local histories note a community project of landscaping the former depot site as an amenity to the new depot in 1889.

The 1936 addition to the structure was a functional two-story, flat roofed freight facility constructed of a red brick to match the original.

C. The End of the Line.

The importance of rail service in the early growth and development of Marion has already been expressed. The decline of railroading has also been felt in the level and type of services provided and facilities needed in Marion.

In 1971 passenger service was halted. That was the end of an era. No longer were area families focused on the depot for the comings and goings associated with business and personal travel. Dispatching and switching functions for the Milwaukee Road line continued from the depot until 1980.

The Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railway declared bankruptcy in 1980 and began to sell off its assets. In 1981, the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad bought the trackage through Marion. Within two years, the trackage east of town and southwesterly toward Cedar Rapids was abandoned. Only a single track from the industrial area on the eastern edge of Marion west to a junction with Illinois Central Gulf trackage in the north central area of Cedar Rapids remains of the rail service which fed the growth of Marion's economy in former days.

In 1980 the Marion depot was also offered for sale. In 1983, the property was purchased by investors who planned to restore the building for retail and office purposes. After receiving bids on the required work, they discontinued the project. Their conclusion was that the costs (even with historic preservation tax credits, industrial revenue bond financing, and property tax abatements) exceeded the economic value and return needed to finance the project. The property has been for sale since that date.